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Watershed Protection: A Project Focus

EPA 841-R-95-004

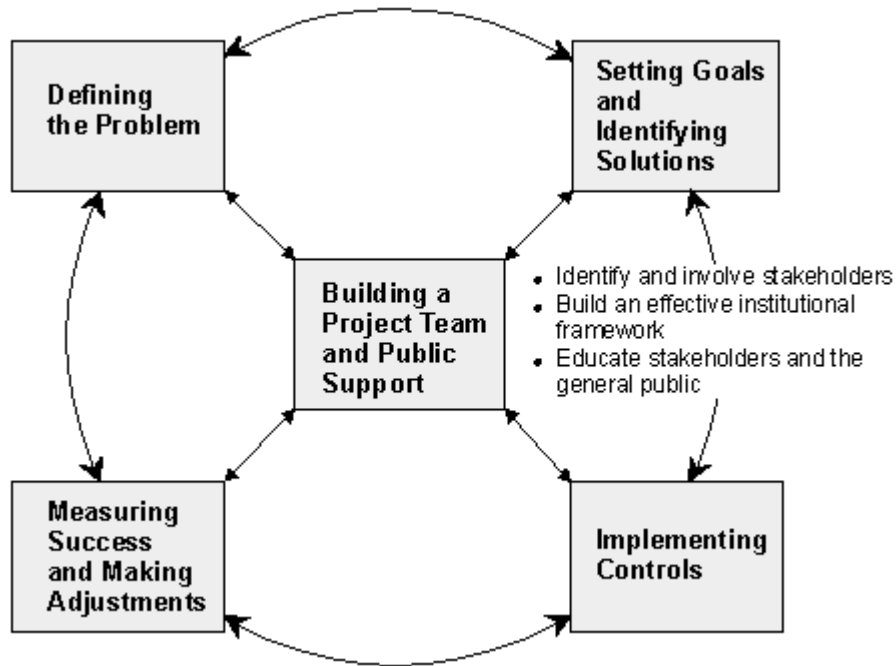
Office of Water

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Chapter 4: Building a Project Team and Public Support

August 1995

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Identify and Involve Stakeholders

Successful watershed projects bring together the public, citizen groups, researchers, and government agencies with an interest in the watershed and the project's outcome. Some representatives may have a special interest in protecting water resources, others in enhancing the socioeconomic aspects of quality of life (e.g., jobs, businesses, tourism).

Such a broad base of stakeholders creates a team that combines the expertise, authority, and interests of each organization. This can be especially important later in the project when help and cooperation are needed from several agencies or when gray areas of jurisdiction arise in which no agency has clear authority. Also, some critical management steps may rely on voluntary programs or may require mobilization of broad public support to secure funding.

The use of committees can be effective in involving stakeholders and providing the project team with valuable information. Citizen advisory committees may include representatives from local business groups, environmental groups, recreational organizations, and landowners associations. Representatives from government agencies, colleges, and universities, as well as other local experts may serve on technical

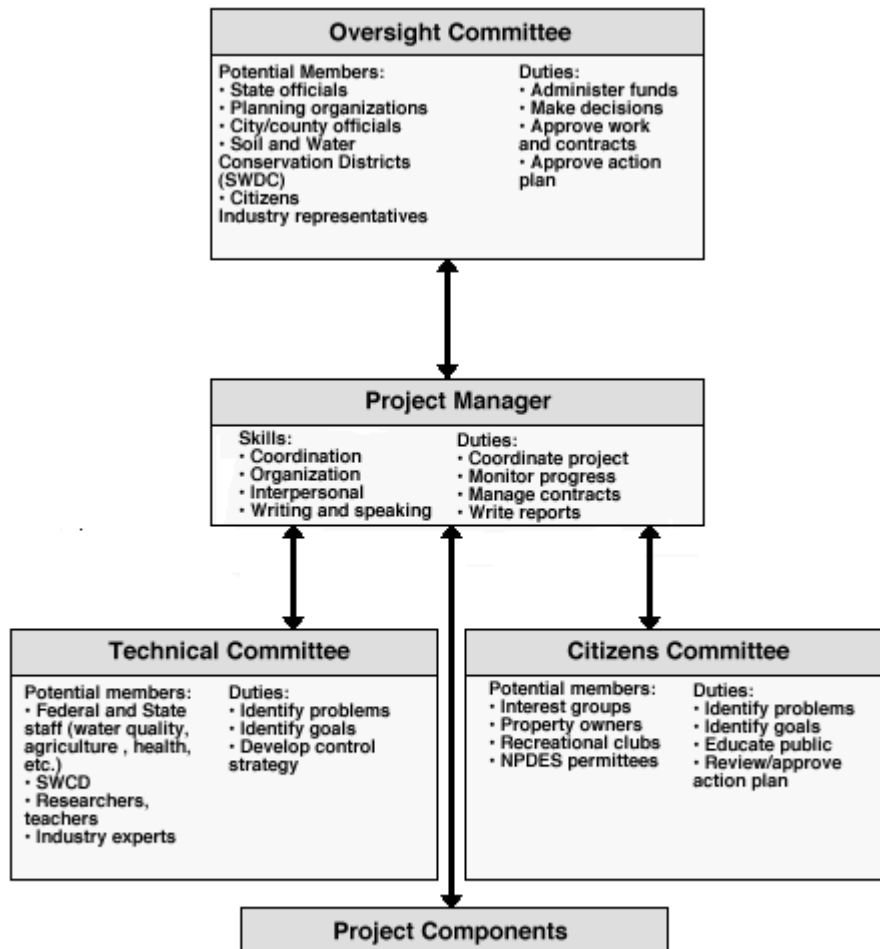
committees (Brichford and Smolen, 1990). Citizen monitoring groups may form to involve local students, teachers, and outdoors-oriented people in gathering useful data and identifying problems.

Highlight 2 describes efforts to locate stakeholders in Puget Sound watersheds. Highlight 3 lists the stakeholders in the innovative Anacostia River Restoration Project.

Build an Effective Institutional Framework

A common theme among successful watershed projects is involving personnel from multiple organizations in a decision-making role throughout the life of the project. However, just as watersheds exhibit different water quality problems, the structure that evolves to manage watershed projects can vary significantly. For example, project administration may be centralized, as in a state water quality agency, or run at the local level with the support of state or federal agencies. Institutional arrangements may be highly formalized or may depend more on informal networks of citizens and local officials to ensure coordination.

Figure 4-1 shows a type of administrative structure that has been used in some watershed projects and National Estuary Program projects. This is presented as an example, and is by no means the structure of choice for every watershed or every state. The main decision-making body, referred to in Figure 4-1 as the oversight committee, has overall responsibility for the success of the project, for administrative matters, and for coordination with the lead agency. The lead agency, typically the state water quality agency or a local organization, may maintain ultimate authority to approve the plans and recommendations of the oversight committee. Source: Brichford and Smolen, 1990.

Figure 6. Example administrative structure of a watershed project

Source: Adapted from Brichford and Smolen, 1990

Figure 4-1. Example administrative structure of a watershed project.

Highlight 2**Puget Sound Watershed Planning**

Local Watershed Management Committees form the backbone of efforts to protect Puget Sound in the State of Washington from nonpoint source pollution. One of the first lessons learned from these committees follows.

Finding “Affected Parties” (Stakeholders): Affected parties can be determined by considering the point and nonpoint sources and beneficial uses in each watershed. Each source, from agriculture to septic systems, and each resource, from salmon to shellfish, is important to certain citizens and professionals. These individuals often have enough interest to participate in the watershed planning process. It is often helpful to work through existing organizations--a dairy group, a board of realtors, or an environmental organization--to identify potential members.

"To balance out our committee so that it wasn't all agency people," explains Becky Peterson, project manager of the Silver Creek early action watershed in Whatcom County, "we invited all the property owners within the watershed to participate by attending an initial meeting. At the meeting we decided to break this group into three smaller groups--businesses that were located in the watershed, farms in the watershed, and citizens' groups. Then the members of these three groups chose who they wanted on the committee. I think it was a good way for the residents to feel they were being adequately represented."

Source: Puget Sound Water Quality Authority, 1991.

In addition to local, state, and federal agency representatives, the oversight committee's membership should include a broader population of stakeholders--environmental groups, business groups, or other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)--that are interested in the ecosystem. Committee size should represent a balance between the need for expertise and community representation and the need to have a manageable group.

The project manager coordinates and monitors all project activities and is critical to a smoothly running and focused project. The manager is responsible to the oversight committee and/or lead agency for tracking project expenditures and funding requests and for producing project documents such as watershed action plans and the final project report. The roles of the lead agency, committees, project manager, and staff can be formalized so that all participants know what to expect. See Appendix B for an example

protocol of participants' functions and responsibilities from a Puget Sound watershed project.

Highlight 3

The Anacostia River Restoration Project

The Anacostia River Restoration Project is featured in highlights throughout this document because it illustrates many of the principles being encouraged under EPA's Watershed Protection Approach.

Background: The Anacostia River is a tributary to the Potomac River and has a watershed of about 150 square miles. The watershed has a variety of pollution and habitat modification problems. Starting in the 1930s, construction projects along the Capitol Mall and Washington's central business district transferred much of the surface drainage of the Tiber River to the Anacostia. This created a substantial combined sewer overflow (CSO) problem on the lower, tidal portions of the river. In addition, approximately 75 percent of the Anacostia watershed's forest cover has been removed for urban development and agriculture, resulting in high stormwater flows and pollutant loadings.

From an early date, the Anacostia was targeted by Maryland as a Critical Area under the Chesapeake Bay program. With impetus from this program, the Anacostia Restoration Agreement was signed in 1987. The four principal signatories were the State of Maryland, Maryland's Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, and the District of Columbia.

Stakeholders: The Anacostia River Restoration Committee, the main oversight committee, consists of representatives from the signatory agencies:

District of Columbia Department of Public Works

District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

Prince George's County Department of Environmental Regulation

Montgomery County Department of Environmental Programs

Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Maryland Department of the Environment.

Other stakeholders and participants include:

Izaak Walton League

Anacostia Watershed Society

Alliance for Chesapeake Bay

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission
National Park Service
Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin
Metropolitan Council of Governments
U.S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Source: Anacostia Restoration Team, 1991.

Another reason for the type of institutional framework shown in Figure 4-1 is that watershed projects often do not follow a neat "command and control" organizational structure. Reaching agreement often requires consensus--that is, each participant agrees with the group decision or at least agrees to support the group decision--or negotiating a constructive compromise position. The following was written about lake management in New York State, but applies to watershed management in general:

No one governmental entity has absolute power over lake management. This situation has its benefits and drawbacks. On the plus side of the ledger, every organization and constituency has some say over decisions which affect the lake and its watershed. The structure is disseminated and hence "democratic." On the other hand, it seems that decisions could be made more efficiently if each lake and its watershed had one omnipotent management agency...

One fact is clear, government agencies seem to be quite capable of making decisions on issues where there is little disagreement between the major constituencies. If the land developers, the fishermen, the hotel owners, the lakeshore property owners, the academics and the elected officials all are either neutral or on the same side of an issue, then the only problem will be how to finance it. When constituencies disagree, the government decision process often breaks down (New York Federation of Lake Associations, 1990).

The Watershed Protection Approach emphasizes finding solutions by bringing the constituencies together in a long-standing commitment to succeed.

Educate Stakeholders and the General Public

The purpose of education in a watershed project is to increase awareness of the natural system and of problems in the watershed and, where necessary, to elicit behavior changes in particular groups. Behavior changes by developers, farmers, loggers, municipal and

industrial permittees, local officials, and other groups are often crucial to successful watershed projects.

Education helps everyone living or working in a watershed understand the relative contributions of different types of pollution sources. For example, in the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuary drainage in North Carolina, the public initially perceived that toxicants from point sources were the major water quality problem. However, monitoring data and professional judgment indicated that nutrients were the primary cause of problems in the region. Highlight 4 describes a series of workshops in the Stillaguamish Watershed, Washington to educate the public about types of nonpoint sources. Further examples of public education programs are available (EPA, 1989).

Effective education and public involvement lead to workable and long-lasting answers to watershed problems--answers that are arrived at through a process that goes well beyond the one-way communication of the traditional public hearing approach. For these reasons, watershed projects should have explicit plans for involving and educating the public (Puget Sound Water Quality Authority, 1991).

A public education program is a set of activities, often with a specific purpose and a target audience. Effective education programs address each target audience in terms that are meaningful to that audience. Key target audiences include:

Oversight and citizen advisory committee members

Local elected officials

State and local agencies

Agencies providing incentives

Corporate and land use interests

Trade association

Environmental groups

News media

Highlight 4**Public Workshops in the Stillaguamish Watershed, Washington**

To help Snohomish County develop plans for reducing pollution in the Stillaguamish Watershed and Warm Beach area, the county held a series of workshops in May 1988. The purpose of the workshops was to educate the public about the four types of nonpoint sources that had been identified by citizen groups as most important and to form workgroups to draft text for the Watershed Plan. The workshops were:

Workshop 1	Septic Systems and Household Waste: Impacts on Water Quality in the Watershed
Workshop 2	Agricultural Practices: Challenges and Solutions
Workshop 3	Forestry Practices in the Watershed: Historical and Future Perspectives
Workshop 4	Development and Stormwater Runoff: Impacts on Water Quality in the Watershed.

Source: Cole et al., 1990

Timing is an important factor in designing a public education program. Early in the watershed project, emphasis should be put on informing everyone about existing pollution problems and the nature of the upcoming planning process. Later in the project, emphasis should shift to the implications of different control strategies, actions, or BMPs expected of each target audience, and how success will be measured. Throughout the process, project accomplishments should be reported so that support and enthusiasm for the project are maintained.

In addition to the audiences mentioned above, a project team may wish to cultivate an environmental ethic in target audiences that can affect policy well into the future. These long-term audiences include schoolchildren, teachers, and civic organizations. The project team must decide how to divide resources for education among the different types of audiences.

Some tried-and-true methods of public education include:

- Newsletters, brochures
- Mass media
- Demonstration sites such as model farms
- Signs
- Meetings, workshops, and field trips
- Self-completed checklists or inventories
- Onsite technical assistance, inspections, or inventories
- Citizens monitoring programs
- Contests
- Training and certification programs.

To help prepare for education of the public, it may be helpful to develop a list of target audiences, behaviors to be changed, groups or entities most respected by each target audience, and a strategy for how to approach these groups and work cooperatively with them.